

The Planning and Development Committee

Public Hearing, March 11, 2016

Raised S.B. No. 331

An Act Establishing A High-Speed Internet Service Pilot Program

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I have carefully reviewed Raised S.B. No. 331, An Act Establishing A High-Speed Internet Service Pilot Program, and I strongly support the bill. As I understand it, the pilot program funding in this bill could help Hartford bring desperately needed high-speed internet services to the more than 80 small businesses that struggle with adequate, affordable connectivity in Hartford.

I am the owner of several Express Kitchens home improvement businesses across Connecticut, including one on Main Street in north Hartford, as well as a Hartford hardware store and other businesses that my wife and I have operated for many years.

After all the years of working hard to succeed in this state, I can only say that I believe that the lack of affordable high-speed Internet service along the section of Main Street where restaurants, beauty parlors and other small businesses operate is comparable to a developing country. It should not be the standard in Hartford and most other areas of this state, which is known for high tech and advanced services businesses.

My fellow business owners in Hartford, the capital of our state, have no assurance that we will ever be able to purchase fast and reliable Internet access at a fair price without some support from our elected officials such as this committee. We are at an economic development disadvantage in the community in which we are raising our families and trying to bring decent affordable services and products to our neighbors. We need a bill such as SB-331 to jumpstart a joint state and municipal effort, in concert with the

business communities of Hartford and across state, to create a vibrant and affordable digital economy for all residents, businesses, and community anchor institutions – especially those small businesses that cannot afford to pay thousands of dollars just to get a decent internet connection.

I, and I can speak for many of my fellow Hartford business owners, welcome the opportunity presented by SB-331 to support our municipality in proposing a business plan based on public-private partnership cooperation to finance and build high speed Internet access in our city. While many small business owners in other locations complain about prohibitively high costs for connecting a business to a fiber line, along with tens of thousands of dollars in monthly connection costs, in my neighborhood of Hartford, we simply cannot get a basic level of broadband service at all. How can we successfully compete with other states that are incenting and encouraging investments by public private partnerships in high speed broadband?

I'm sure you will hear from rural folks today and it is truly sad that residents and businesses of the state's capital city have the same complaints as lightly populated communities. As a matter of digital equity, we need a statewide solution and SB-331 is a great first step in developing competition to motivate the incumbent internet service providers and other investors in fiber networks to invest in this state, with the support of all the state's municipalities and communities.